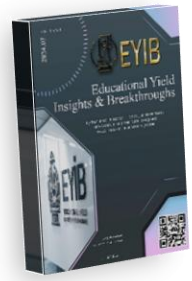
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The Impact of Tourism on the Economy: Global Evidence, Ecotourism and the Case of Uzbekistan

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Annotatsiya

Tourism is one of the largest service sectors in the world economy and a major source of foreign currency earnings, jobs and public revenue. This article reviews how tourism affects national economies by using published statistics and peer reviewed research (descriptive secondary data approach only identifiable sources used UN Tourism WTTC World Travel & Tourism Council National Statistics Committee Uzbekistan). International arrivals were about 1.52 billion in 2025 and international receipts about USD 1.9 trillion (WTTC)1 Travel and tourism generated USD 11.6 trillion or 9.8% of global GDP and supported 366 million jobs (2). In Uzbekistan 11.7 mn foreign visitors were recorded in 2025 (46.8% more than in 2024),7 visitor exports USD 4.8 bn (8) but direct share of tourism in GDP was only 2.5% in 2024 (still below level in 2019: 3.6%).6 Evidence suggests a positive economic role for tourism but size of the effect depends on measure used, leakage and exposure to shocks. Ecotourism (nature-based segment) is dealt separately: about 8 bn visits per year are made to world's protected areas (up to USD 600 bn in visitor spending generated); less than USD 10 bn a year is spent on managing them.11 No official national ecotourism statistics for Uzbekistan could be found. Secondary data were used and some figures come from press reports of official releases so findings are descriptive rather than causal.

Kalit so'zlar: tourism economics; GDP contribution; employment; tourism exports; tourism-led growth; ecotourism; protected areas; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction. Tourism has moved from being a niche activity to one of the main economic sectors of the twenty-first century: visitors spend money on accommodation, food, transport, guides and souvenirs; that spending is income for businesses and wages for workers if they are abroad (foreign currency is brought into country) so many governments treat tourism as a strategic sector and Uzbekistan is one — they have set a goal of attracting 20 million international visitors a year by 2030. The economic role of tourism is easy to say but hard to measure. Different organisations count different things. UN Tourism reports arrivals and receipts; WTTC "total contribution" of travel and tourism including indirect and induced effects; national statistical offices direct share of tourism in GDP using Tourism Satellite

Account methodology etc. These figures are not interchangeable and comparing them without care can give a misleading picture. This article therefore states for every number which organisation produced it and where you can check it. Ecotourism adds another question. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines it as responsible travel to natural areas where environment is conserved, well-being of local people sustained and interpretation and education are involved.12 So it should provide income for rural communities and nature protection at the same time which makes it relevant for economic analysis. The problem here is how big is the economic impact of tourism globally and in Uzbekistan and how much evidence there is that tourism drives economic growth? Objective of the study is to summarise main economic effects of tourism using traceable sources. Objectives of the study are:

1. To show the main global indicators of tourism's economic size in 2025.
2. To explain how tourism affects GDP, employment and exports.
3. To examine the position of Uzbekistan by official national statistics.
4. To examine academic evidence on whether tourism causes economic growth.
5. To talk about risks and limits of relying on tourism.
6. To study the economic role of ecotourism and protected areas. The study aims to answer five questions:

RQ1 How big is tourism's contribution to global economy? RQ2 What does official data say about tourism in Uzbekistan? RQ3 What does academic research tell us about the link between tourism and growth? RQ4 What risks and limits affect tourism's economic impact? RQ5 What is the economic role of ecotourism and how well documented it is for Uzbekistan?

2. The idea that tourism can drive growth is known as the tourism led growth hypothesis. Tourism earns foreign currency (which pays for imports of capital goods), jobs (attracts investment), competition (economies of scale) and economic growth. Balaguer and Cantavella-Jordá tested this for Spain using time series methods and found a long run link from expansion in tourism to economic growth 3 . Their work is often cited as an early empirical example of the hypothesis but later research was not so one sided. Brida, Cortes-Jimenez and Pulina reviewed empirical literature and concluded: results vary by country, period and method used: many studies support tourism led growth but others find growth causes tourism or effect runs both ways and some find no clear link at all.4 The review reminds us correlation does not imply causation between tourism and GDP. A second strand of research looks who benefits. Mitchell and Ashley discuss how tourism can reduce poverty but emphasise gains depend on how much spending stays in local economy.6 Where hotels are imported or owned by foreign firms food and equipment part of visitor spending leaves destination (leakage). That's why a lot of arrivals does not mean much to the local economy. Ecotourism research asks whether visitor spending funds conservation and local livelihoods: Balmford et al calculated that terrestrial protected areas around the world receive about 8 billion visits annually generating up to USD 600 billion in visitor spending but less than USD 10 billion a year is spent safeguarding and managing them (11). The authors say this gap shows both how much nature costs and that areas producing it are underfunded. For Uzbekistan Abidova and Rakhmatullayeva surveyed visitors to protected natural areas (250 in 2022–24) and discuss prospects for sustainable ecotourism but their record gives no national visitor or revenue totals.13.

For Uzbekistan the main sources are official. NSS publishes share of GDP generated directly by tourism (using TSA methodology).6 Academic work is thin. A short descriptive paper by Eraliyev and Mamadiyarov links tourism to GDP and reports that tourism service exports rose from USD 1.041 billion in 2018 to USD 1.313 billion in 2019 but has no statistical model and some of its figures are internally inconsistent so only for that 2019 export baseline is it used here (9). Of the sources reviewed none gives a recent source-by-source comparison of global and Uzbek tourism indicators. This article tries to fill part of that gap.

3. Methodology

This is a descriptive secondary data design study. No survey or interview was carried out and no new data were collected. All figures are from published sources (retrieved 28 October 2026) and three types of source were accepted: (a) intergovernmental organisations (UN Tourism); (b) official national statistics (National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan); (c) peer-reviewed/published academic work. WTTC figures were taken from reports of its 2025 results by trade publication2 and page8 of a government tourism-committee (because the original WTTC data portal could not be reached for this study); they should crosschecked against WTTC's own Economic Impact Research before article is submitted to journal. Press reports were used only when they named an official body as origin of figure (e.g., National Statistics Committee7).

The indicators compared are international arrivals, international tourism receipts, contribution to GDP, employment and visitor or tourism exports. If a number was calculated by the author it is said so in text (two numbers like this appear: Uzbekistan's 2024 arrivals figure (subtracting from total for 2025 the reported increase of almost 3.7 million) and ratio of 2025 to 2019 tourism exports). As the study compares reported figures not hypotheses statistical tests were not used because they would not be informative.

4. Results. Table 1 shows the main global indicators for 2025.

Table 1. Global tourism indicators, 2025 Indicator Value Source International tourist arrivals 1.52 billion (+4% on 2024) UN Tourism1 International tourism receipts USD 1.9 trillion (+5%) UN Tourism1 Total tourism export revenues (incl passenger transport) USD 2.2 trillion (estimate) UN Tourism1 Contribution of travel and tourism to global GDP USD 11.6 trillion (9.8 % of global GDP) WTTC2 Growth of the sector / growth of the global economy 4.1%/2.8% WTTC2 Jobs supported 366 million (1 in 3 all new jobs created). WTTC2 Note: UN Tourism and WTTC use different definitions so their figures should not be added together. International tourism returned to normal growth path in 2025. Arrivals were up by about 60 million to 1.52 billion and the 4% growth matched pre-pandemic growth rate of roughly 5% a year between 2009 and 20191 WTTC say that sector grew 4.1%, almost twice as fast as global economy (2.8%) and one in three new jobs2 By region Asia-Pacific's travel and tourism contribution was USD 3.29 trillion (+8.1)%2 North America was USD 3.05 trillion (+1.0)%2 Asia and Pacific remained however 9% below its 2019 arrivals1 Table 2 now turns to Uzbekistan using share of GDP generated directly by tourism.

Table 2. Direct share of tourism in Uzbekistan's GDP, 2019–2024 Year. Share of GDP (%) 2019. 3.6 2020. 0.5 2021. 1.0 2022. 1.5 2023. 1.3 2024. 2.5 (National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan Tourism Satellite Account methodology; data

updated 4 December 20256). The direct share of tourism in GDP fell from 3.6% in 2019 to 0.5% in 2020 during the pandemic but recovered to 2.5% in 2024 (though still about one percentage point below that level in 2019)6 Table 3 gives other indicators for Uzbekistan. Table 3. Selected tourism indicators for Uzbekistan Indicator. Value Source Foreign visitors, 2025. 11.7 million (+46.8%; about +3.7 million). National Statistics Committee via Kun.uz7 Foreign visitors, 2024 about 8.0 million (author calculated from 7 Visitor exports, 2025 USD 4.8 billion; nearly half of Central Asia's USD 9.9 billion WTTC via gov.uz8 Tourism service exports, 2019 USD 1.313 bn (USD 1.041 bn in 2018). Eraliyev and Mamadiyarov9 Ratio of 2025 visitor exports to 2019 tourism service exports about 3.7 times (author calculated from 8,9 Note: the 2019 and 2025 export figures come from different sources and may be defined differently so ratio is only indicative.)

Arrivals grew by 46.8 % in 2025 (much higher than the world average of 4%).1,7 WTTC figures published by Uzbek tourism authority put Uzbekistan first in Central Asia: visitor exports increased by 26.4 % in 2025 and total travel and tourism contribution will reach USD 29.7 bn by 2036.8 Local example is Khiva whose walled inner town Itchan Kala has been on UNESCO World Heritage List since 1990 and forms part of the country's cultural tourism product.10 Table 4 shows available evidence on ecotourism and protected areas.

Table 4. Nature-based tourism in protected areas (global estimate). Indicator Value Source Visits to protected areas per year about 8 billion (conservative estimate) Balmford et al.11 Visitor spending linked to visits up to USD 600 billion per year Balmford et al.11 Spending on managing protected areas less than USD 10 billion per year Balmford et al.11 Ratio of visitor spending to management spending roughly 60 : 1 or more (author's calculation) Taken from 11. Note: estimates are from 2015; these figures are order-of-magnitude values and not comparable with the data in Table 1 for 2025.

The ecotourism evidence is global and old. Protected area estimates show that nature attracts a lot of spending but only a small fraction goes back to conservation (11). For Uzbekistan no official ecotourism visitor or revenue series was found so national contribution of ecotourism cannot be quantified here. Only Uzbek source located (2026 article based on survey of 250 visitors) has no totals13. 5. Discussion. The results give two pictures which need to be read together. Globally tourism is a big fast growing sector — WTTC's figure of 9.8% world GDP and 366 million jobs puts it in the top 5 contributors to world economy (2). In Uzbekistan growth speed is higher still and visitor exports USD 4.8 billion are a big share of region total (8). This fits with view that tourism is foreign currency earner (3). However direct share of tourism in Uzbekistan's GDP (2.5% in 2024) is much smaller than the global "total contribution" figure of 9.8%2,6 — two different numbers measure two different things: first counts only value added by tourism industries; second adds indirect and induced effects across supply chain. The gap should not be taken as a sign of failure of Uzbek tourism but it does remind us that comparisons across sources have to be made with care; it also means that Uzbek figures for 2025 (not yet available in same form) may show higher share than 2024 because arrivals are rising sharply (this is an expectation not finding).

The academic literature has another warning. Even if tourism and GDP rise together, causation is not clear4 and benefit to local people depends on how much

spending is retained locally (5). Visitor numbers are therefore an incomplete measure of success. In Uzbekistan one risk is that a large share of arrivals are short haul visitors from neighbouring countries (who usually spend less per trip than long haul tourists); Eraliyev and Mamadiyarov paper says the same but this study had no spending data to test it9; pandemic drop from 3.6% to 0.5% shows also how exposed sector is to external shocks6 This study has several limitations: First secondary data were used (some figures came through press or government portal reports rather than original publishers), second 2024 arrivals and export ratio are author's calculations, third sources use different definitions so Tables 1 to 3 describe the situation but cannot be combined into one model and fourth no data on tourist spending per visit, local retention or regional distribution (e.g. Khorezm) were included. In future research the Tourism Satellite Account in full could be used, input-output multipliers or regional data could be used to measure indirect effects.

Ecotourism shows opportunity and measurement problem. In theory it is the type of tourism most closely related to local benefit and conservation (TIES definition).12 The 60:1 gap between visitor spending and management spending suggests entrance fees, concessions or community-benefit schemes could finance protected areas (11). For Uzbekistan with mountain, desert and lake landscapes along side heritage cities ecotourism could diversify product beyond cultural sites like Khiva. It's a reasonable expectation because without official statistics we don't know how big the segment is and collecting them should be a priority. Ecotourism also carries risks because pressure from visitors damages the resource on which it depends.

The findings have three practical implications. Policy-makers should look at several indicators (arrivals, receipts, direct GDP share and jobs) rather than just arrivals; support local supply chains to reduce leakage; diversify source markets and products (heritage destinations included Khiva) to reduce exposure to shocks.

6. In conclusion. Tourism is a large economic contributor globally (1.52 billion arrivals, USD 1.9 trillion receipts and 9.8% of global GDP in 2025) according to UN Tourism and WTTC.1,2 Uzbekistan has had exceptional growth in visitors and tourism exports7,8 but direct share of tourism in GDP was still below 2019 level in 2024 (6). Academic evidence shows positive role for tourism but not automatic one: effect depends on measurement, leakage and resilience (4,5). Ecotourism has strong potential but poorly documented in Uzbekistan. Tourism is best seen as part of diversified economy and not engine of growth guaranteed. [1] UN Tourism. "International Tourist Arrivals Up 4% in 2025 Reflecting Strong Travel Demand Around the World." World Tourism Barometer, 20 January 2026. https://www.untourism.int/news/international-tourist-arrivals-up-4-in-2025-reflecting-strong-travel-demand-around-the-world [arrivals; receipts; export revenues; regional data; outlook for 2026]. [2] Business Travel Executive. "Travel and Tourism Contributed Over $11 Trillion to Global GDP in 2025." 16 April 2026 (reporting WTTC data). https://www.businesstravelexecutive.com/news/travel-and-tourism-contributed-over-11-trillion-to-global-gdp-in-2025/. [USD 11.6 trillion, 9.8%, 4.1% vs 2.8%, 366 million jobs; regional GDP]. [3] Balaguer, Jacint and Manuel Cantavella-Jordá. "Tourism as a Long Run Economic Growth Factor: The Spanish Case." Applied Economics 34 no.7 (2002):877–84. [4] Brida, Juan Gabriel, Marta Cortes-Jimenez and Manuela Pulina. "Has the Tourism-Led Growth Hypothesis Been Validated? A

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